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(ECO) IN THE CONTEMPORARY  
RUSSIAN SOCIETY  
(AN EXAMPLE OF THE UDMURT  
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## Abstract

The main problem to be solved within the research project is the issue of the sense and social importance of ethnic cultural organizations (ECO) in the contemporary Russian society and in the Udmurt Republic in particular. What is the purpose of creating volunteer organizations based on ethnicity? Do these organizations make any contribution to the building of the civil society in Russia? What are their prospects?

The study includes the content-analysis of the newspapers published by the youth ethnic cultural organizations (ECO): Jugendheim (the association of Russian Germans, a newspaper *The Juhei*); Shundy (the Udmurt youth association, a newspaper *The Gerd*); the biographic and expert interviews with representatives of the above-mentioned associations; the theoretical interpretation of the results of the content – analysis and interviews with the object of revealing specific mechanisms of ethnic identification; the use of specialized vocabulary: the clarification of the notions “ethnicity”, “identity”, “multiculturalism”; the construction of the author’s model of ethnic identity.

The research constituted a basis for the development of an analytical conception of ethnic identity. This conception allows one to consider ethnic identity as a process of constructing models and concepts of ethnicity within the theoretical and political discourse. Such constructing occurs when there is a “lack” of ethnicity in “the present” which has to be met through the constructs of “ethnic history” (the past) and ethnic “projects” (the future). The ways of constructing the Udmurt ethnicity as a part of “the Finno-Ugric world” were determined, as well as the ways of constructing “the German ethnicity” that shapes the image of German “Youth’s Home”.

Further research on ECOs involves revealing major concepts underlying the discourse of these organizations, as well as clarifying the role of ECOs in ethnic policy pursued in the Udmurt Republic.

**Ключевые слова:** ethnic-cultural organizations (ECOs); ethnicity; identity; multiculturalism.

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ОБЪЕДИНЕНИЯ (НКО)  
В СОВРЕМЕННОМ РОССИЙСКОМ  
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Основной проблемой, которую необходимо было решить в процессе исследования, является проблема смысла и социальной значимости национально-культурных объединений (НКО) в современном российском обществе, в частности, в Удмуртской Республике. С какой целью создавались общественные организации по этническому принципу, есть ли у них перспективы в будущем? Можно ли считать такие объединения способствующими построению гражданского общества в России? Исследование предполагает: проведение контент-анализа прессы молодежных национально-культурных объединений (НКО) «Югендхайм» (организация российских немцев, газета “Yu hei”), «Шунды» (удмуртская молодежная организация, газета «Герд») в 2014-2015 гг.; проведение 27 биографических и экспертных интервью с представителями этих организаций; теоретическую интерпретацию результатов контент-анализа и интервью с целью выявления специфических механизмов этнической идентификации; работу с категориальным аппаратом: прояснение понятий «этнос», «идентичность», «мультикультурализм»; конструирование авторской модели этнической идентичности.

Исследование послужило основой для разработки аналитической концепции этнической идентичности. Последняя позволяет рассматривать этническую идентичность как процесс конструирования моделей и концептов этничности в процессе теоретического и политического дискурса. Такое конструирование происходит в ситуации «нехватки» этничности в «настоящем» и восполнение этой «нехватки» посредством конструкторов «этнической истории» (прошлого) и этнических «проектов» (будущего). Были определены способы конструирования удмуртской этничности как входящей в «финно-угорский мир», а также немецкой этничности, формирующей образ немецкого «молодежного дома».

Дальнейшее изучение НКО предполагает выявление концептов, находящихся в основании дискурса этих организаций, а также прояснение роли НКО в этнополитике Удмуртской Республики.

**Key words:** национально-культурные организации (НКО); этничность; идентичность; мультикультурализм.

In Russia, the issue of ethnicity became a focus of popular interest and academic inquiry in 1990, when the definition of social reality in terms of class struggle lost its validity. As for the state, in the globalizing world it turns, according to Z. Bauman [2; 3; 4], into "the security service of megacorporations" [3, p. 47]. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, of its constituent ethnic territorial units created under the Soviet rule, has led to the emergence of a new social space, which has to be comprehended.

Internationalism and multiculturalism, seemingly opposite, are both ideological constructs based on the discourse of power [1; 5]. Whereas internationalism in Russia implied the existence of "the Soviet people" as above-ethnic community whose needs and interests were the concern of governmental and party elites, multiculturalism implies existence of a great number of distinctive ethnicities whose ethnic cultures can vary so widely that it necessitates creation of a certain above (over)-ethnic level of authority for regulating "inter-ethnic relations" and developing programs for tolerant interaction of peoples. In both cases naturalization of power occurs, which means that an ideological construct acquires the semblance of "natural" social order [6, p. 136]. Thus, the discourse of multiculturalism suggests that there are many diverse ethnic cultures whose distinctions are determined by "natural causes".

"Ethnicities" are likened to "collective individuals" acting on the social stage, with their distinctive psychology, character and history [9, p. 96]. Designating "ethnicities" constrained in their distinctiveness, the discourse of multiculturalism realizes itself on the border between them, within the distance determined by the discourse itself. The rhetoric of multiculturalism proves to be that very level of authority, that very discourse of power, which rules the process of incorporating "ethnic minorities" into social integrity [10, p. 134].

The discourse of multiculturalism that realizes itself in creation of ECOs is directed primarily at the regulation of various ethnic manifestations [7, 8]. The formation of numerous ECOs has helped to ease tension that is caused by debates about "sovereignty" of the Udmurt Republic.

As a result of the study in 2014-2015 (27 interviews and the content-analysis of the mass media), the ways and principles of constructing the ethnicity space have been identified. For illustra-

tive purposes there have been used concrete examples of Udmurt ECOs: "Udmurt Kenesh" ("Udmurt community"), "Shundy" ("Sun"), and the association of Russian Germans "Jugendheim".

The construction of "the Finno-Ugric World". The content-analysis has revealed a distinct orientation of the organization Udmurt Kenesh presenting itself as a public association of all Udmurts (800,000 people) that has a specific place in "the Finno-Ugric" world rather than within the space of Russia.

The *Gerd*, which devotes a third of its materials to the topic of "the Finno-Ugric world" and gives quite a full coverage of local events, practically does not carry any items concerning the rest of the country.

The image of the Udmurt ethnicity created by the newspaper is mainly drawn on such events as folklore festivals, congresses of the Finno-Ugric peoples, and the like. Reading the newspaper publications one learns that representatives of the Udmurt ethnicity organize conferences of Finno-Ugric writers, publish books on history and literature, and enjoy favorable and even rapturous comments of Finnish and Hungarian experts. An attractive image of "the Finno-Ugric world" encourages young people to become familiar with the history of the Finno-Ugric peoples through participation in research expeditions, creative centers, ethno-futuristic festivals.

All this creates the model of a comfortable and propitious world, with which ethnic "minorities" link their future and whose origins they trace to "the past" which correlates with the concept of shared "original homeland" of the Finno-Ugric peoples. According to one of the publications, Udmurtia is situated exactly on the territory of the "original homeland". Magna Hungaria (Great Hungary) "in the past" was situated nearby.

"The Finno-Ugric world" with natural "ties of relationship" between the Finno-Ugric peoples seems to have existed primordially. But, in fact, the history of "the Finno-Ugric world" does not date back before 1992 and has in its foundation the concept of affinity of the Finno-Ugric languages. The formation of "the Finno-Ugric world" was to a large extent facilitated by the Udmurt national movement (the nation-wide congress of the Finno-Ugric peoples was held in Izhevsk in 1992). Being a linguistic construct,



the concept of “the Finno-Ugric world” has become the basis for organization of ethnic “reality”. Imaginable community of “the Finno-Ugric world” assumes objective character in the documents of Finno-Ugric congresses, resolutions adopted by UNO, UNESCO, with which Finno-Ugric organizations are developing close contacts.

Finno-Ugric unity suggests the integration of “peoples” rather than individuals or the whole mankind. The concept of “a people” (“unique ethnic minority”) serves as a foundation for the Finno-Ugric idea. Quite a number of the newspaper publications concerning rural problems create an image of a “people” firmly established on “land”. Such a “people” is not corrupted by civilization; “land” and “community” are among their most important values. The image of a “people” created by these publications emphasizes the “collectivism” of Udmurts which implies that the “natural” state of the Udmurt ethnicity is a “communal solidarity”, vitally important in conditions of ethnic “minority”. The notions of “relationship”, “a people” underlying the idea of “native land”, promote its prevalence in the newspaper publications, which leads to creation of the rhetoric of an “indigenous people” inseparable from Udmurtia “land”. The development of this logic suggests that privatization and selling of “native land” will be regarded by such a “people” as a real “disaster”. Any sort of market relations might result in extinction of the ethnicity (some publications even used the word “genocide”). The concept of “a people” also promotes the creation of the model of “collective identity”, “community” claiming to special statehood and collective rights.

The newspaper publications create an image of “a people” who needs protection and special rights which could compensate the harm caused by “colonization” and “repression”. The newspaper representing the voluntary organization *Udmurt Kenesh* shapes the view of “typical” representatives of the ethnicity, of real “bearers” of ethnic culture. Items on personalities – representatives of the Udmurt people – account for 20 % of all the materials published in *The Gerd*. They refer the reader to the immediate ethnic reality, publishing portraits and “profiles” of exponents of “true nature of the people”. For designation of “typical” representatives various stereotyped formulas have been used, as in the case of profile-type stories (timed, as a rule, to jubilee celebrations).

In *The Gerd*, the Udmurts are depicted as bearers of distinctive cultural practices sustained over the course of the centuries. An Udmurt poet or writer is usually portrayed as a peasant by birth, who due to his education became famous and made a “contribution” to the development of the Udmurt culture. Although these publications carry no appraisal or allusion to ethnic “traits of character”, they tend to idealize “the past” through represented images. According to the newspaper articles, the present-day condition of the Udmurt ethnicity is the result of “the past” which must be cherished and preserved. Ethnicity appears as “memorial”; “the present” is always an appeal to “the past”, its reconstruction.

The voluntary organization creating the space of ethnoideology proves to be nothing other than “an ethnic enterprise” which enables its participants to get economic and political “dividends” such as the financing of various collective projects (either by the Russian government, or by the partners from Finland, Hungary, and Estonia), popularity gained through the mass media, and an opportunity to participate in important political events. Thus the activity of voluntary organizations becomes a “project”.

Projection of the form (stereotyped image) onto the content (events of “the past”) produces an effect of real existence of ethnicity, of its historical continuity, enabling one to fill a “vacant” space of “the present” with the phantom of “the past”.

Through generalization and systematization of stereotyped statements, the newspaper creates a space for realization of the form of ethnicity. But this space remains vacant, revealing “lack” of ethnicity which has to be met through persistent talk on the ethnicity issue.

The imaginary association of Russian Germans: constructing the “Youth’s Home”. According to the survey, *The Juhei* representing the organization *Jugendheim* carries items both on youth and ethnic issues. The items on the organization’s activities stand apart. Their analysis shows how realization of the collective (organized) identity of the Russian Germans occurs.

The reports on the organization *Jugendheim* account for 25 % of all the materials published in *The Juhei*. Such a big amount suggests that the newspaper aims to represent *Jugendheim* as the collective whole and serves for its self-presentation. *Jugendheim* is portrayed not only

as a youth association, but also as an organization aiming at preservation of cultural practices and traditions of the Russian Germans. There are stories describing “meeting of generations”, “joining the association”. *Jugendheim* presents itself as a “highly organized” society with effective mechanism of self-governing, evidence of which are reports on election meetings, working schedule, and the like. The organization seeks to preserve its own structure and increase its own effectiveness. This is supported by publications about youth’s activities and seminars conducted for the leaders of youth organizations. The articles on psychological or sociological subjects are designed to help understand the relationships within the organization.

It should be noted that the main focus of *Juhei’s* attention is the way the members of *Jugendheim* spend their leisure time. In numerous articles their leisure pursuits are described as healthy (walking tours to the countryside as an example), and creative (dancing clubs, concerts and festivals). The newspaper stories on participation of *Jugendheim* members in various contests serve to emphasize the role of the organization in discovering and supporting talented young people.

A special importance is attached to the organization’s contribution to the spiritual and intellectual growth of young people, to the development and realization of their abilities. As an illustration, numerous poems, short stories, sketches written by the members of *Jugendheim* are published in the newspaper.

Thus, the newspaper creates an image of an integral, solidary community which assists young people in developing their abilities, promotes their intellectual and spiritual growth. The organization helps a young person to express him/herself, to discover his/her potentialities, to realize him/herself as an integral personality. However, the image of an “integral community” shaping an “integral personality” is created by *Jugendheim* members themselves. Constructing “collectivity”, “community”, “organization” occurs in the newspaper columns where the organization’s activities are represented from a specific standpoint determined by its name – *Jugendheim* (Youth’s Home). The type of the newspaper articles suggests a strong emphasis on the word “home”. They depict *Jugendheim* as a “big united family”, a “jolly crowd”. The atmosphere reigning within the

organization is described as “friendly”, “merry”, “cordial”, and “hospitable”. These descriptions create an impression of “home” with all its attributes – cosiness, comfort, warmth. *Jugendheim* is a circle of reliable and supportive friends. The image of “home” gives good reasons to construct the concept of “Germanness” as a set of positive qualities, such as kindness, artistry, originality, liveliness, activity, spirituality, sense of humour, energy, and respect for traditions.

An ethnic aspect of constructing “community” is covered in the newspaper articles describing the life of German people and the Russian Germans, in reports on occasions related to the German language and German and all-European public holidays. It should be noted, that items on ethnic problems make up 25 % of all the publications, which suggests that ethnicity, though important, is yet not the main issue for the youth organization *Jugendheim*.

Fairly often the information on the German language learning is found. The description of *Jugendheim’s* active participation in the work of linguistic centres, seminars and contests implies viewing a national language as one of the major factors of ethnicity which must be maintained. The German association provides an effective mechanism for drawing young Russian Germans into the German language space and keeping up good knowledge of the language. Activation of the German language intercourse occurs through publishing articles in German (32 % of all the newspaper stuff).

The members of *Jugendheim* tend not to base ethnic identity on shared descent or heritage. They are more likely to emphasize collective identity, relating to German “community” existing “here and now” among other ethnic organizations. 14 % of all the information on the activities of *Jugendheim* members deals with their participation in different festivals, contests and international centres. Among regular participants of these events are all ethnic societies of the Udmurt Republic, incorporated into the association of ethnic voluntary organizations “*Vmeste*” (Together). The specific content of ethnicity manifests in interaction with other ethnic communities: the members of the organization declare their distinctiveness through distinguishing between “us” and “them”.

The existence of any ethnic organization suggests a certain level of ethnic self-reflection aimed

at designation of ethnic unity, at constructing an image of an ethnicity. Such organization's newspaper is to be regarded as a space for constructing an identity of an ethnic association.

The ethnic unity of Russian Germans is designated as a "home" where members of *Jugendheim* can demonstrate their personality, reveal their best qualities. The "Home" is a community providing conditions for individual realization and allowing a person to express his/her "Germanness". The "Home" regulates "the individual – society" interaction through models of effective, useful and interesting activity. Participation in these activities serves to construct the image of "fulfilling", a "productive" life.

Thus, the image of ethnicity created by the newspaper is a constructed category. The newspaper shapes the reality rather than reflects it. The existence of "Germanness" in Udmurtia is disputable; ethnic reality appears to realize itself only in the process of distinguishing between "us" and "them". It is only the reality of distinguishing that reveals itself. However, distinguishing means establishing the distance between "us" and "them" at the moment of designating.

The name *Jugendheim* is a space for constructing a German identity considering life events from a position designated as a "community" ("home"). This position acts as structural principle of reality determining relations between individuals according to the rules of distinguishing between "Germans" and representatives of "other" communities. The rules consist in knowing the German language and German customs. *Jugendheim's* newspaper perpetuates the idea of existence of ethnicity in a "place" ("home"). The members of *Jugendheim* must only follow the rules of living in "the home" – to take an active part in "family" occasions, to practice a friendly and cooperative pattern of behavior.

Within the discourse of ethnic cultural organizations constructing ethnic models, ethnicity never appears as "the present", as something that "has taken place".

Ethnicity is always "future-oriented"; it is regarded as undermanifested in "the present". Therefore, it must be cultivated, "nurtured". It is no coincidence that all ethnic cultural associations include youth organizations. This cor-

relates with the concept of "revival" of ethnicity, the results of which are carried into "the future".

Thus, the activity of ECOs comes to shaping forms of ethnicity, or ethnic models. This is what is recognized as a process of identification within the discourse of ECO. However, identity is not viewed as free self-identification of an individual, but as a stereotyped pattern applicable to the whole ethnicity. From this standpoint an ethnicity is regarded as a typical "collective individual".

ECO manifests as an aspect of social reality revealing discrepancy of form and content. In its official form, ECO is an element of the "civil society" providing an individual with an opportunity of free self-identification. However, in its content, ECO suggests existence of ethnic substance inherent in certain individuals, thus implying essentiality of ethnicity, primordial stratification of society by ethnic origin.

This makes impossible free self-identification of an individual, as he/ she is perceived to be a born representative of a given ethnicity with assigned cultural distinctions.

In the course of the research, there were established the principles of realizing the ethnic identity through activities of ECOs, with *Udmurt Kenesh*, *Shundy* and *Jugendheim* as concrete examples. These principles consist in shaping the discourse model of ethnicity (imaginary community) creating a space for ethnic identification.

The research constituted a basis for the development of analytical conception of ethnic identity. This conception allows one to consider ethnic identity as a process of constructing models and concepts of ethnicity within the theoretical and political discourse. Such constructing occurs when there is a "lack" of ethnicity in "the present" which has to be met through the constructs of "ethnic history" (the past) and ethnic "projects" (the future).

The ways of constructing the Udmurt ethnicity as a part of "the Finno-Ugric world" were determined, as well as the ways of constructing the "German ethnicity" shaping the image of German "Youth's Home".

Further research on ECOs involves revealing major concepts underlying the discourse of these organizations, as well as clarifying the role of ECOs in ethnic policy pursued in the Udmurt Republic.



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